The Man Behind Kamran Top: Captain Muhammad Kamran and Operation Chumak (1989)

Introduction

When people search for the highest battlefield in the world, the name Siachen Glacier comes up. But within the vast saga of the Siachen conflict, one operation, and one man, stands apart from all others. That man is ***Captain Muhammad Kamran*** *(later Lieutenant Colonel), and the operation is* ***Operation Chumak****, conducted in April and May of 1989 in the Skardu Sector of Pakistan.*

Point 22158, a frozen summit at over 22,000 feet above sea level, now bears his name: ***Kamran Top****. This is the story of how it got that name.*

Background: The Chumak Sector Before 1989

Chumak is a minor sub-sector of the Bilafond Sub-Sector in the Skardu region. It had remained quiet since 1984, with the exception of the Chumak Operation in 1989. The forwarded posts of the sub-sector overlook the Gyong Glacier and provide vital observation of enemy positions, including the Baniya Base.

A Pakistani post had been established in the area in 1985 but was later withdrawn after suffering losses from avalanches and enemy artillery fire. The post was re-established in 1988 by the 9 Northern Light Infantry on the order of Commander Force Command Northern Area.

The Intelligence Picture: February–April 1989

*The chain of events began quietly in early 1989. In February, signals from the area began pointing toward unusual enemy activity. On **22 February 1989**, Indian helicopters carried out aerial reconnaissance over the Chumak area, followed by artillery strikes on Pakistani posts in the days that followed. Pakistani helicopter reconnaissance confirmed the situation: the enemy had established **five new posts and bases** in the sector.*

*By early April, intercepted communications, including reports of awards being issued to members of an Indian expedition force, made clear that something significant was being planned. The situation came to a head on **15 April 1989**, when signal intercepts confirmed that Indian forces intended to occupy the highest commanding feature in the area: the peak overlooking the Chumak Glacier.*

Higher headquarters placed troops on heightened alert and began preparations for a response.

Early Expeditions: Courage at Every Step

*On **17 April 1989**, the Commanding Officer of 9 AK made a decisive call: troops would be inserted onto the saddle by helicopter while a ground route was simultaneously explored. Two expeditions were launched.*

*The first, **Kausar Force**, led by Captain Kausar and Captain Kamran, approached from the left. They established intermediate positions K-1 and K-2, but were halted by a technically demanding climb and wide crevasses blocking further progress.*

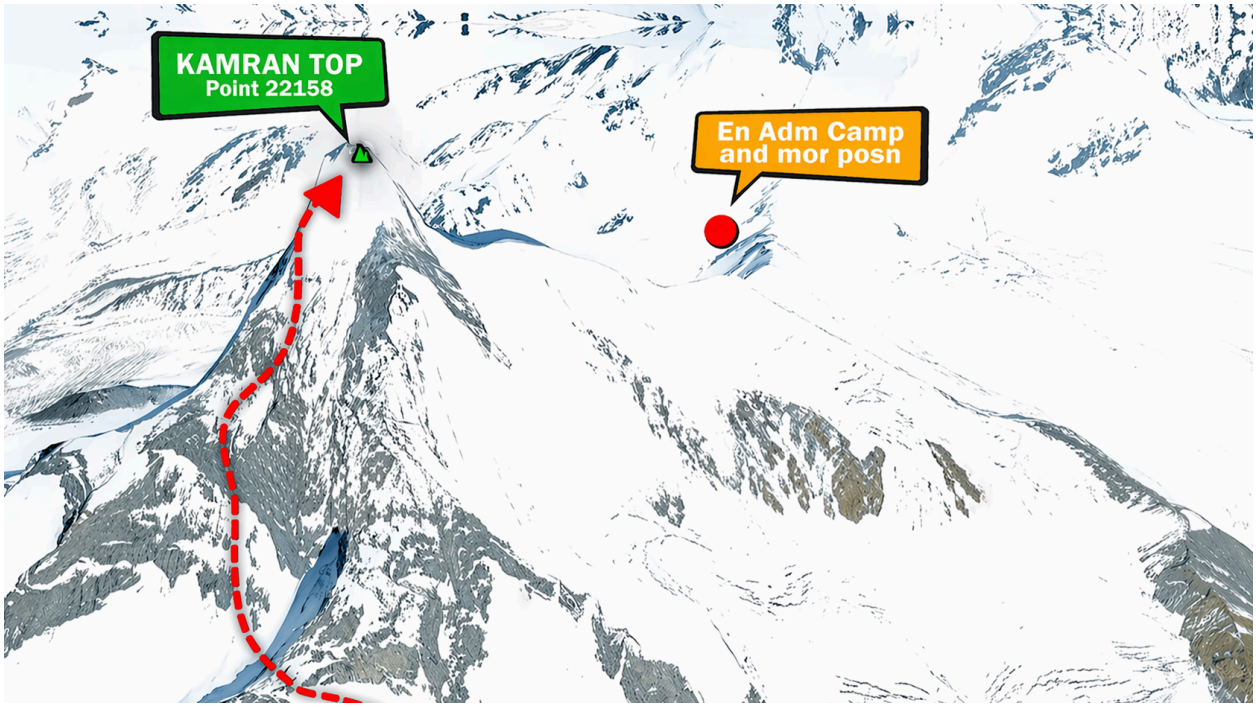
*The second expedition, under **Captain Javed**, made greater headway, reaching a base camp near the saddle by **22 April**. By **25 April**, the team's lead elements were within reach of the saddle. Then came tragedy. As the men rested in their tents, a massive avalanche buried **Captain Javed Akhtar and two other officers** beneath tons of snow. The expedition ended there.*

*Separately, **Captain Tariq's platoon** advanced along a razor-edged ridgeline, establishing Positions T-I, T-II, and T-III, the last approximately 3,000 yards below the enemy post, by **1 May 1989**.*

Lieutenant Naveed and Naik Yaqub: First Men on the Ridge

*On **19 April 1989**, a helicopter piloted by Captain Sehgal and Captain Zia inserted **Lieutenant Naveed and Naik Yaqub** onto the ridge. Poor weather closed in immediately after, cutting off all contact. Three supply drops were made to keep the two soldiers alive during the isolation that followed.*

Captain Muhammad Kamran: The Turning Point



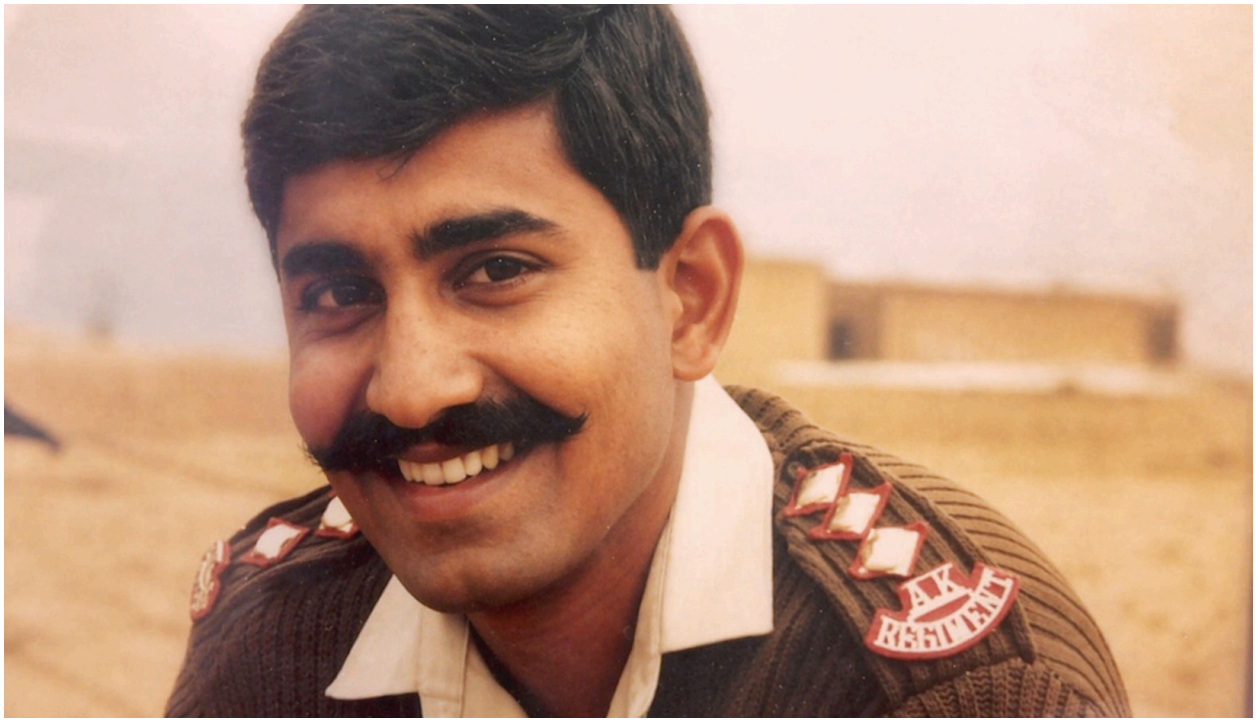
*On **21 April**, Commander Asif Bukhari tasked **Captain Muhammad Kamran** with reaching Lieutenant Naveed's position, establishing communication, and reinforcing the post.*

*What followed during the helicopter insertion alone would test any soldier's nerve. A poorly secured load caused Captain Kamran to somersault mid-air. His pack fell away, and his gloves were torn off by the wind. For **nearly fourteen minutes**, he hung upside down before the helicopter finally reached the landing point. He touched down under active enemy small arms fire.*

When an Indian helicopter appeared, Captain Kamran seized a weapon from Naik Yaqub and engaged it, driving it back.

*Recognising that Lieutenant Naveed's position was not the highest point, and that a more dominant feature lay **700 to 800 metres away**, Captain Kamran requested helicopter insertion at that location. When that proved impossible, he did what soldiers of his calibre do: he climbed.*

The Climb to Point 22158



*Captain Kamran took four men, **Naik Aslam, Sepoy Said Jan, Naik Munir, and Sepoy Jawed**, and began the ascent under sustained enemy small arms fire.*

The route was among the most dangerous imaginable. One side offered a sheer drop of 3,000 to 4,000 feet. The other: an ice slope angled at 70 to 80 degrees. The team advanced using fire and movement, pitching ropes as they climbed. At one point, Captain Kamran lost his footing and fell, hanging in the air until the rope held him. He pulled himself back up and continued.

When the sector Commander asked about the operation's progress, Captain Kamran responded with verses from the Quran:

> **نَصْرٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَفَتْحٌ قَرِيبٌ** *(Help from Allah and a near victory)*

*They reached the **summit at 22,158 feet** to find Indian soldiers advancing toward the same peak from the opposite side, no more than **300 to 400 metres away**. Captain Kamran and his men immediately engaged them, killing two and forcing the rest to withdraw. Using a boulder four to five feet in diameter, they dislodged it onto an enemy base below the summit, where no grenades were available.*

*By approximately **1600 hours**, Captain Kamran had set up an LMG, posted a sentry, and secured a position commanding the entire surrounding area, including all enemy posts.*

To signal success, he transmitted another Quranic verse:

> **وَقُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ** *(And say: Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished, for falsehood is ever bound to vanish)*

*This feature was named **Kamran Top**.*

After the Summit: Medical Aid and Artillery

Captain Kamran then heard distress calls from Lieutenant Naveed's position. He rushed over, found both Lieutenant Naveed and Naik Yaqub in critical condition, administered oxygen, medicines, water, and food, pitched a new tent for them, and ensured their well-being before returning to Kamran Top.

*Throughout the night of **21-22 April**, enemy artillery and mortar fire continued from multiple positions. On **22 April**, the **Sitara-e-Jurat**, Pakistan's third-highest military honour, was awarded to Captain Kamran, Lieutenant Naveed, Captain Raheel, the pilot, and Naik Yaqub.*

*On **25 April**, Forward Observation Officer **Captain Zafar** arrived, bringing the strength at Kamran Top to six. He began calling in artillery strikes on enemy positions based on Captain Kamran's targeting guidance. One strike triggered an avalanche that destroyed an enemy base camp.*

The Raid: 29–30 April 1989

*By **29 April**, the garrison at Kamran Top had grown to eleven men. Brigade Major Bilal arrived as the twelfth. After a joint reconnaissance confirmed enemy positions, both officers agreed the time had come for a direct raid.*

Captain Kamran gave strict instructions: no details about the raid were to be transmitted over the radio, both to preserve surprise and to prevent interception.

*The raiding party: **four officers, four NCOs, and four soldiers**. Before departure, Captain Kamran asked each man to write his name, parentage, and home address on paper, for identification should they not return. He told his men he wore a chain with Ayatul Kursi, so if the worst came, it would identify his body. Together they recited **Surah Yaseen** and offered prayers.*

*He invoked the memory of the **Battle of Badr**, the first battle fought by early Muslims in Ramadan, drawing a direct parallel with their own mission, fought at the highest altitude in the world, also in the month of Ramadan.*

The approach route was treacherous. The Indian side was a vertical drop; their own side was a 70 to 80 degree glass-smooth ice slope. Then, unexpectedly, a blizzard rolled in, providing natural concealment. Fresh snowfall gave the team's crampons some grip. No pitons were used; the sound of driving them into ice would have broken the silence of surprise.

*The party advanced in single file until within **25 to 30 yards of the enemy position**, where they identified a sandbagged dugout. Major Bilal called out for surrender. The enemy responded with a rocket launcher, LMG, and small arms fire from depth positions.*

*The LMG jammed in the extreme cold. Captain Kamran directed **Sepoy Said Jan** to manually chamber a single round, which warmed the mechanism enough to resume fire.*

***Sepoy Ashraf** was ordered to engage with rockets. He fired two. Then he picked up a submachine gun and kept firing. He was struck in the chest and fell, **martyred on the spot**. His bravery stood in a class of its own.*

Four enemy soldiers were killed. One fled; Major Bilal ordered him not to be fired upon, reasoning that his retreat would spread fear. As ammunition ran critically low, Captain Kamran dispatched four men to Kamran Top for resupply, sent Captain Zafar to call artillery, and Major Bilal to report to the commander. Captain Kamran was left with Captain Rafaqat, Havaldar Farid, and the body of Sepoy Ashraf Shaheed.

As they attempted to recover Sepoy Ashraf's body, it slipped down the slope and was never recovered.

The Last Stand: Faith Against Odds

*Observing **10 to 15 Indian soldiers** moving toward him, Captain Kamran concluded a counterattack was coming. His remaining men had almost no ammunition, one magazine and 50 rounds for the LMG. He briefed his men on calling in SOS artillery, knowing it would land dangerously close to their own position. He offered each man the option to withdraw.*

Every single one chose to stay.

They told their captain: wherever you shed your blood, we will lay down our lives alongside you.

*Captain Kamran called out the **Azan** at each of the four corners around his men, and together they recited:*

> *يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ (O fire, be coolness and safety for Ibrahim)*

*It was later established that the enemy had fired approximately **4,000 to 5,000 artillery rounds** at Kamran Top during this period. Not a single man was lost.*

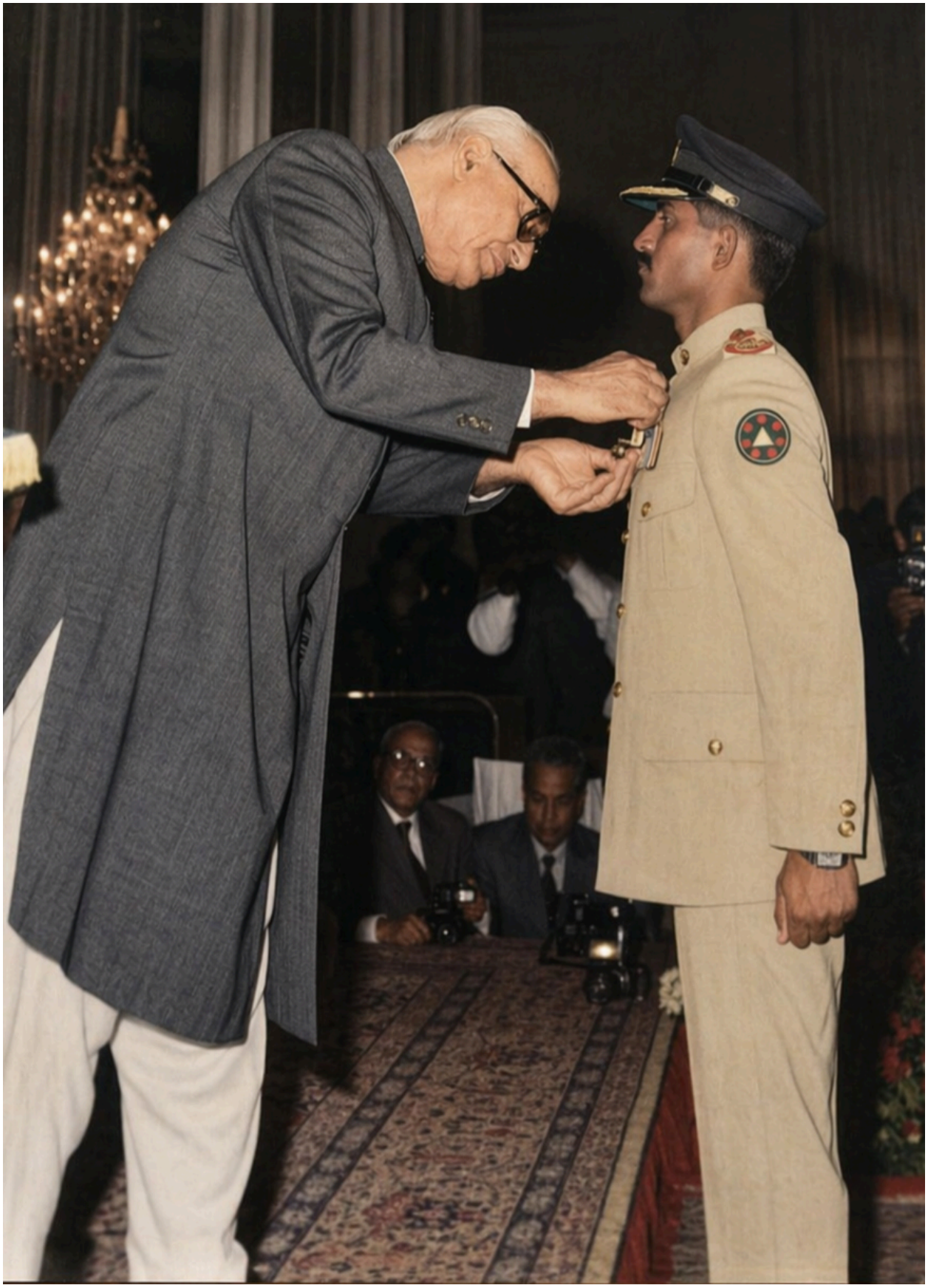
The Outcome

An intercepted enemy message told the story from the other side: the Indian force reported being under fire, cutting ropes, and withdrawing, with one officer and three other ranks killed.

The final blow forced the enemy to withdraw, and a meeting was held at which almost all Pakistani terms were accepted. The area was vacated and declared a demilitarised zone.

*By **4 May**, no further significant enemy activity had been recorded. Captain Kamran and his men celebrated **Eid al-Fitr** on Kamran Top, a celebration they would recall for the rest of their lives as one of the most profound they had ever known.*

Who is Muhammad Kamran?



*Captain **Muhammad Kamran** (later Lieutenant Colonel) was an officer of **9 AK Regiment**, Pakistan Army. He was awarded the **Sitara-e-Jurat**, Pakistan's third-highest military decoration, for his actions during Operation Chumak 1989. The peak he captured, Point 22158, was named **Kamran Top** in his honour, a permanent mark on the map of the Siachen region bearing the name of a soldier who refused to be stopped by altitude, enemy fire, extreme cold, or the absence of his gloves.*

His name may not appear in popular history books. But the mountain remembers him.

Conclusion:

Operation Chumak took place in April–May 1989 in the Skardu Sector, within the broader Siachen conflict between India and Pakistan that began in April 1984. The Siachen Glacier remains one of the highest-altitude military deployments in the world.